

Preface

Women lawyers have made great strides over the past few decades. We now have four women Supreme Court Justices, including a Black female Supreme Court Justice, and a Hispanic female Supreme Court Justice. Some women lawyers have reached high levels of success in the public and private sectors. Yet work remains to be done because women still lag behind men at the highest levels of the profession, even though for many decades women have graduated from law school in numbers equal to or greater than men.¹ Although women lawyers were only 3 percent of the profession from the 1960s and into the 1980s,² today women are still only 38 percent of the profession.³ These statistics suggest that women lawyers face obstacles to success over the course of their careers, leading some women to leave the profession entirely.⁴

The legal profession, like many other professions, has not dismantled the obstacles that impact women. In Chapter 1, our readers will see the stark statistics regarding women in the profession in general and women of color in the profession in particular. These statistics are not just numbers.

1. *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession 2022: Women in the Legal Profession* (2022), AM. BAR ASS'N, www.abalegalprofile.com.

2. *Id.*

3. *Id.*

4. Roberta D. Liebenberg and Stephanie A. Scharf, *Walking Out the Door: The Facts, Figures, and Future of Experienced Women Lawyers in Private Practice*, AM. BAR ASS'N (2019), available at www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/women/initiatives_awards/long-term-careers-for-women/walking-out-the-door.

Behind every study are real women and real stories. Many women entered the profession believing the workplace was fully open to us. But it can take years to realize that there are obstacles to our advancement and success, and then it can take many more years of trial and error to accept and understand that fact and determine how we can address the obstacles we encounter.

Some might say we should alter our mindset about obstacles—that we should be grateful for obstacles because they make us stronger and help us develop grit and a growth mindset. Some might say we just need to develop tougher skin. While many of us nurture a deep sense of gratitude daily to maintain our fortitude, the better argument may be that obstacles are meant to be overcome and that our sister lawyers (and a few brother lawyers) possess wisdom in their stories that we can use to transform ourselves.

In this book, we present a collection of essays with information about the status of women in the legal profession and stories about identifying and overcoming bias and the hidden hazards in the practice of law while addressing the *business* of law. The stories in this book then go on to explain the value of being true to ourselves, establishing unique career paths, and finding guideposts and beacons to help enlighten us along the way to success.

There is nothing more powerful than powerful women (and a few good guys) sharing their stories. These stories tell us that we are not alone, that there is a sisterhood in the profession that supports us, and that we can learn from one another and lift up others who share our experiences. We hope you find ideas and hope in these stories. We need each of you in the profession, and we intend for this book to provide a guidebook through tough times, a road map for eliminating the obstacles we can change, as well as ideas for tackling obstacles that seem more intractable.

This book is a product of a team effort from the members of The Woman Advocate Committee (WAC) of the ABA Litigation Section, which addresses many of the hurdles and obstacles still faced by women, people of color, and others in the practice of law. WAC seeks to provide positive tools, encouragement, and support to elevate the careers of women lawyers, and to move women lawyers forward in practice and life.

The book is designed to be read in its entirety. It may be read by individual essay or by isolated chapter. Each chapter has an introduction

and concludes with discussion questions to be used for a book club or networking event, either within a firm or elsewhere.

And now, we have some incredible, deeply meaningful, inspiring, and hope-filled stories to tell you.

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